

Flag Day 2018

Today we gather to celebrate the American Flag, but first a history lesson.

President Woodrow Wilson issued a presidential decree declaring the first Flag Day on June 14, 1916. World War One was on. President Wilson knew that the United States was being drawn into the unpopular war, and he needed to drum up some support for the war, and he may have seen Flag Day as way to drum up some patriotism.

However, this really wasn't the beginning or the purpose of Flag Day. By the time President Wilson proclaimed Flag Day, it had already been around for a while. On June 14, 1889, a kindergarten teacher in NYC, James Balch, held a Flag Day ceremony for his students. Two years later, the NY Board of Education formally adopted Flag Day, June 14th as a school celebration.

But, even the teacher, James Balch, was probably being a little derivative and probably got his idea for Flag Day from a Fredonia, Wisconsin school tradition dating from 1885 of celebrating a Flag Birthday on June 14th.

It was on August 3rd, 1949, that President Harry Truman signed a law passed by Congress making June 14th a National Flag Day.

So, Flag Day's been around in one form or another for a long time. This shows how good ideas seem to keep building and growing and evolving over time in our free society.

Now back to the Flag we are here to celebrate.

The American Flag is unique because its design represents that we are 50 sovereign states unified in common

goals. While many other countries have states and provinces, there are few where the states are in fact sovereign. (Switzerland is similar.)

In the early history of America, this state sovereignty was more obvious than is today. In the first 100 or 125 years of our nation's history, people flew their state flags, not the American Flag. The flying of the American Flag was pretty much limited to federal buildings, forts, the navy, and US Territories.

But, times changed and territories became states. Attitudes shifted. And, then there was the civil war.

It was the civil war that prompted the widespread flying of the American Flag by businesses and individuals --- at least throughout the north. The civil war was the impetus for rallying around the flag of our federal government. It is

Abraham Lincoln's vision of ONE NATION that put us on the path that brings us all here today.

It is no coincidence that those early Flag Birthday celebrations in schools that popped up in the late 1800's were conceived and directed by civil war veterans in the north.

And even with the civil war, it wasn't until 1894 that the State of New York started flying the American Flag at state buildings. As was the traditional practice until that time, state flags --- and only state flags ---- were flown at state and municipal buildings.

Today we take it for granted that we fly the American Flag, first and foremost, at all public buildings ---- local, state or federal. But that's only been our tradition for a little over a hundred years.

It is interesting that at the West Barnstable Fire Station we only fly the American Flag and not the Massachusetts Flag. Is this a reflection of changes in our society and culture towards federalism and nationalism? Are we losing sight of the role of our sovereign states? I don't know, but it's something to think about as we celebrate and contemplate our American Flag.

And then course, maybe, we should start flying the Massachusetts at the fire station?

So, let's remember President Lincoln's vision for America as we celebrate the flag that he loved and gave his life for. President Lincoln said:

"My dream is of place and a time were America will once again be seen as the last best hope on earth".

God Bless America. God Bless the Union. Thank you all for being here today.

BUT WAIT..... special presentation to Meetinghouse Farm & Judy Desrochers.....